

**NIMAN**



**NIMAN RANCH PORK COMPANY**

2551 Eagle Avenue  
Thornton, Iowa 50479

**RANCH**

March 21, 2003

Mr. Barry L. Carpenter  
Deputy Administrator  
Livestock and Feed Program  
Agricultural Marketing Service 2029  
South Agriculture Building  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Carpenter:

In regard to the December 20, 2002 Notice published by the Livestock and Feed Program for U.S. Standards for Livestock and Meat Marketing Claims. We wish to comment. We represent 280 farmers raising pigs according to the Animal Welfare Institute's humane husbandry standards for pigs, sold under the Niman Ranch label. Our pigs are raised on pasture or in deeply bedded pens, and are generally are regarded as "free range".

The claim for free-range found in the December Notice specifies that 80% of the pigs' production cycle include access to pasture. While the free-range claim attempts to set some bottom line standards, it falls short of accounting for regional climate conditions that warrant more shelter and it does not address whole-farm systems used during the lifecycle of the herd. For example, the term free-range is commonly used by farmers who keep their whole herd on pasture from early spring through late fall and in deep-straw barns or hoop houses with access outdoors. The same farmers may also farrow piglets indoors in the cold, with those piglets remaining indoors for much of the next six months until marketed in the spring. Such piglets may spend more than 20% of their lives indoors in conditions that allow them to roam and move about freely creating a biologically sound production system and one that does not require overuse of antibiotics. Farmers and businesses marketing pork under a free-range label have found that consumers are looking for production practices that are humane, environmentally sound and take into consideration health and nutrition concerns.

We would like to continue discussion on this issue as we think it is important to the survival of the independent family farmer.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Paul Willis, Manager/farmer  
Lori Lyon, Quality Manager  
Niman Ranch Pork Company